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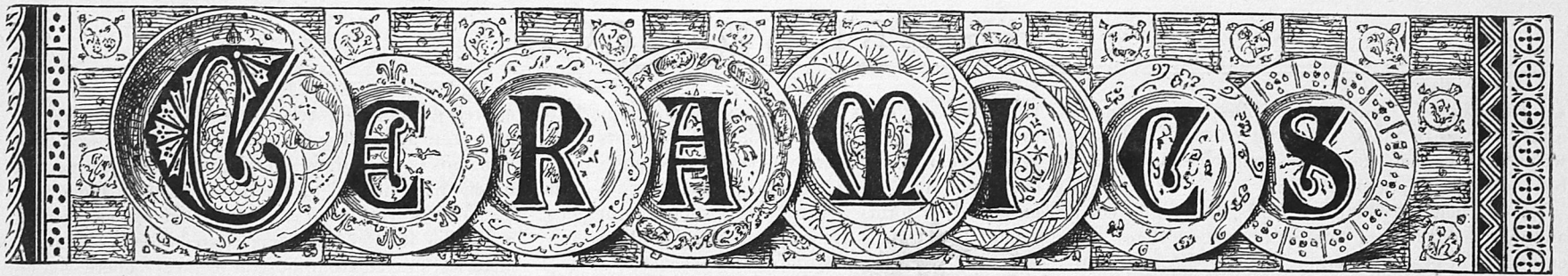
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VALLAURIS WARE.



HAVE just visited the home of a French provincial family possessed by a Vallauris craze. The house itself, as also its owners, bore the ineffaceable stamp of the bourgeois class upon it, and in France the words "bourgeois" and "aesthetic" are about as remote from each

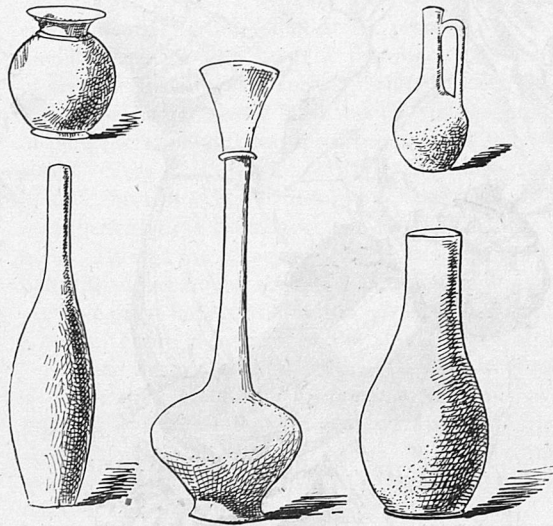
other in signification as zenith is from nadir. No Philistinism in the universe can be more rampant and ineradicable than that of the French bourgeois in the provinces, and nowhere can the taste for ornament, which may be considered instinctive in human nature, flash out with more gorgeous splendor of indefinitely multiplied gilt mirrors, ormolu clocks (sometimes three and four in a room), gilt cornices and panels, gilded furniture, gold-shot upholstery, and chandeliers—to all appearance quite as massively golden as the seven-branched candlestick of the Temple—than in its dwellings. Gilding and glossy white paint seem to express the loftiest aspirations and profoundest yearnings of the aesthetic nature in the French provinces, and a foreigner needs only to remark the affluence of glitter and glare set out upon the balconies of well-to-do houses in a French country town every bright morning—said glitter temporarily expelled from "grand salons" for the purpose of sweeping and dusting—to wonder if mines of gold have not been exhausted by the decorative rage which settled down from the gaudy, meretricious splendor of "le grand siècle," through the Revolution, into the middle classes of the present century and day.

The French home that I visited yesterday was quite as Philistine as any of its neighbors in the town of ten thousand inhabitants—that is, *would* have been but for its Vallauris mania! It had the same disproportionately immense salon, while its kitchen was not larger than an American pantry. This "grand salon" (always the holy of holies in a French provincial family) had all the ordinary gilding and white paint. As usual the floor was bare, slippery, and shining, save where a square of gorgeously blossoming carpet held the place of honor before the polished, gilt-ornamented, and, alas! empty grate. Around this square of carpet were arranged as usual, with apparent vague impression that the grate, even if empty, is the focal point of the room, summer and winter, all the gilt chairs and sofas, leaving the walls blank save for now and then a showy inlaid table on gilt feet, a gilded "jardinière" blooming tropically with artificial flowers, and an "étagère" or two crowded with ornaments. Usually in houses of the same degree of splendor and social position these "étagères" are apparently sacrificial altars to the golden calf, and are covered with gimcracks selected chiefly for their capacity in the way of reflecting golden rays. But in this particular salon, by reason of the mania which possesses the family, they looked like the show-shelves of an artistic pottery establishment, or like a section of the faïence department of the Louvre.

How or why this genuine artistic taste sprang into existence in the bosom of a bourgeois family, space is wanting to explain. A thin vein of artistic susceptibility sometimes runs through commonplace families, unsuspected and invisible for generations. Sometimes this vein in the course of ages gathers force and power enough to vitalize and dominate a whole existence; as Michael Angelo, for instance, was born into a family of magistrates, whose artistic susceptibility, if it existed at all, had existed always as the thinnest of veins.

But it is not particularly of this French family that I wish to write, nor yet of their own special little collec-

tion in which they gloried so much—of plain, glazed, olive-green ware, simple and chaste in shape, with no fanciful painting, no bloated or bulging forms, nothing that distracts the eye from exquisite grace—but of the Vallauris ware generally. This ware is so popular both



VALLAURIS WARE.

on the Continent and in England, so artistic and of so little price, that it may have already entered largely into the affections of our own aesthetic public. Perhaps, therefore, what I shall write about it will not be new to readers familiar with all the aesthetic ideas, abstract and concrete, of the day. But as there may be others

of France which for ages has been given over to the making of pottery, fine and coarse. At present more than seventy modern potteries are there in full blast, while not a spade turns over a lump of mould without displacing some fragment of antique tile, some atom of mosaic or bit of classic-shaped earthenware, to prove that even in the time of the Cæsars Vallauris wares, called then by other names, were known and patronized of the public.

The present owner of the works which produce what is known "par excellence" as Vallauris ware was brought up among the common potteries of the town. It was by lucky "finds," treasure troves turned up by spades, that his attention was first turned to the idea of reproducing antique forms in such material as would bring the utmost beauty of ceramic art into the homes of the people. A score of years ago he produced a few pieces shaped after ancient models. These designs took the fancy of fashionable visitors to that fashionable winter coast, and so added to the pecuniary means of the adventurous potter that he was enabled to go to Italy and visit the museums richest in Greek, Roman, and Etruscan treasures. Returning to Vallauris with portfolio filled with sketched forms, he set to work to reproduce his Etruscan and Pompeian models in the "modern spirit." It is to be supposed that by "modern spirit" he meant beauty with economy, not without.

With increased wealth the Vallauris works gradually produced more and more perfect ware. At present it is delicate yet strong, and rings, when struck, with bell-like tone. It is perfectly impervious to water, and is no more susceptible to breakage than ordinary crockery. It is moulded into all classic shapes, from the massive vases posed on tripod-stands, such as might serve as models for an artist with a rage for Roman or Pompeian interiors, to the exquisite little Trojan cruse or Etruscan beaker which may be bought for seventy-five cents. Most of the forms have a distinct savor of antiquity, and thus, already beautiful by reason of their delicate sea-greens, rich olives, and peacock-blues, are made more lovely by the dim sweet vision they suggest of those divine old days when beauty was worshipped in Hellas, or the fair later ones when Italy became the foster-mother of the arts. As the lovely shapes were first suggested by relics of bygone ages, turned up by plough and spade from the heart of the earth, it may be that the exquisite colors were suggested by the dusky olive groves clothing those Mediterranean shores, the golden orange thickets, and the turquoise blue of that radiant sea—a glory of color that would seem to indicate that nature wrought there in a purely "decorative" mood, with no more subtle purpose than to tickle deliciously the optic nerve.

The forms, however, are not invariably antique, a touch of quaintness being sometimes given them by fantastic curves and quirks born of the taste of the moulder. Some of them are of the more artificial and complicated forms of the Renaissance, while others are simple shapes, gracefully rounded and sweeping, such as have been the primitive potteries of all countries before "taste" came to torture their simplicity into artificial "beauty." The forms given in the simple illustration are those of an assortment lately selected from a wilderness of more elaborate ones by a professor of Harvard College. It may be discreetly whispered here that this whole assortment cost in France only thirty francs. The tall central vase is two feet in height, and serves as the central figure for chimney-piece decoration, all white flowers of large and sculpturesque forms contrasting exquisitely with the green surface, and nothing affording a finer foil than these same greens for great broad-disked golden sunflowers. Once I saw in



RHODIAN FAÏENCE VASE.

who have never seen or even heard of the fashionable Vallauris ware, and who may be grateful to any one who brings real beauty to the knowledge of slender purses, I will write not for the knowing but the unknowing.

Vallauris is a little town on the Mediterranean coast

an artist's home a central vase of this ware holding up a very decorative mass of daintily chiselled alabaster, which mass on inspection turned out to be the tall seed-blossoms of—the common onion!

Every article of Vallauris ware is uniform in color, and thus the beauty of hue in no way interferes with enjoyment of beauty of form. The olive-green is, however, shot with wavy lines of black, which greatly increase the beauty of the glaze. These lines are produced by a trick discovered by the merest accident, as so many other artistic and mechanical innovations and improvements have been. This "shooting" of the glaze is a trade secret, but a writer in *The Cornhill Magazine* declares that the Japanese visitors who saw the Vallauris ware in the Paris Exhibition in 1878 knew the secret, and told the supposed discoverer at once how it was done. Of course, as commonly happens with our latest European inventions, the method had been practised in Japan from time immemorial.

The same writer gives some information on the nature of the Vallauris clay. "It is very tractable and plastic, and is mixed in varying proportions of material, according to the work in hand. Many of the patterns are produced on the potter's wheel, that most primitive of all human machines. The workman who fashions an imitation Trojan vase to-day works exactly as the maker of the original model worked in the ancient and prehistoric city which lies in ruins far beneath even the half-mythical relics of Priam's palace itself. The clay is well kneaded with the hand till it looks like a lump of dough, and is then placed on the rotating wheel. As it turns, the potter models the plastic mass in his hands, coaxing it out here and pressing it in there. The mouldings on the vase are done by the simple use of the finger-nail, a more sensitive and thus more trustworthy implement than any other. During the modelling the material is kept very moist, and it answers so wonderfully to the manipulation of the workman that one can readily understand the meaning of the Hebrew phrase, 'as clay to the hands of the potter.' Not even molten glass seems more obedient and supple to the maker's will. When the modelling is finished the superfluous moisture is scraped off by means of a simple instrument of horn, cost one cent."

So it may be seen the whole process of manufacture is about as simple and uncostly as could be desired, and will continue so unless the bad taste of the public—as there seem to be certain indications—clamors for more elaborate, involved, intricate, and ugly forms, when the expense of manufacture will be thus immensely increased, and the charms of the Vallauris ware, chaste beauty and cheapness, must depart from it. It is but fair to say that the evidence of a degrading influence bearing upon this simple beauty comes from England, where taste is not a predominating quality of the national character.

The more ambitious pieces are fashioned first in

plaster-of-Paris casts and afterward have the marks of the cast removed by hand and the delicate points of the design retouched by a graving knife. As to the color, that is put on as a mineral enamel, which vitrifies in the firing and so forms a glaze. But some of the most beautiful specimens are only partially glazed, and produce a pretty, dulled surface, somewhat like that of "flatted" paint, thus affording a pleasing variation from the finished surface of the ordinary ware.

MARGARET BERTHA WRIGHT.

entirely analogous in style, decorated with beautiful copper green and that pure and rich red borrowed from iron, are derived from different sources. Jacquemart hardly has patience to entertain this idea, though he does not pretend to say at what period and under what conditions Rhodes became possessed of ceramic manufactories strayed from those of Persia. There is a legend that a vessel bound for Venice, and having some Persian potters on board, was wrecked on the island of Rhodes, and that there a manufactory was founded.

So says Miss Jennie C. Young in her "Ceramic Art," without giving any idea as to the date of this event. Jacquemart does not seem to have heard of this, for he only mentions the legend that during the Crusades the knights of Rhodes captured a vessel laden with Persian pottery and artisans, and compelled the latter to establish a factory on the island. At the Musée de Cluny there are many pieces produced in these suddenly formed workshops. Jacquemart says: "One recognizes in them perfectly the work of men who have left their country, of exiles detained far from their homes; certain pieces manifest the impatience felt by the captives to reconquer their liberty; upon one, the workman has painted himself in the attitude of prayer, his arms extended toward heaven, supplicating his Divine Master to break his chains. In these conditions the wares made at Rhodes would suffice to determine the nature of Persian faience, even when we have not under our eyes the original pieces. How, indeed, could we suppose that prisoners, enemies retained in spite of themselves, in a strange land, would have made there any other thing than that which they had long produced every day? How admit that upon an unknown soil, without resources, they could have been able to invent new processes, create a style, imagine the employment of decorating matters different from those they had in constant use? No; the Rhodian pottery is merely Persian faience of an inferior order."

A remarkably beautiful and characteristic example of Rhodian decoration is given in our illustration of a large vase in the possession of the King of Italy. The predominating colors of this extremely interesting faience are white and blue for the grounds and red for the designs.

It is suggested that a "color dictionary" will be necessary if the increase of ceramic tints continues long at the present rate. One reads of the most

remarkable colors; for instance, of "waternixie," a green, possessing the "transparent hue of the waves before they are imbued with the detracting dullness of the waters near the shore"; "fabuleux," an intense red; while "Austrian crackle" is a light orange yellow; "clary" is a delicate straw color; and "coucher-de-soleil" is an orange red. "Amourette" is a bluish pink, "eastern yellow" a marigold hue, and "humberta" a deep peach. Evidently, of many colors, as of many books, there is no end.



DESIGN FOR A PLAQUE. "MOTHER AND CHILD."

DRAWN BY CAMILLE PITON AFTER BEYSCHLAG.

RHODIAN FAÏENCE.

THE ancient faience of the island of Rhodes in form and decoration so closely resembles that of Persia that an ordinary observer could hardly tell the one from the other. Yet learned writers on the ceramic arts have not always agreed upon its origin. Some writers have tried to show that the faïences richly decorated "de mauresque," in which turquoise blue, cobalt manganese, and a sombre olive green prevail, and the pieces